A MODEL OF CHURCH
AND CIVIL POWER

Complete Historical Text (1635)

Composed by Mr. John Cotton and the
Ministers of New England

Sent to the Church at Salem,
Massachusetts Bay Colony

Preserved by Roger Williams in
The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution (1644),
Chapter LXXXI

Edited and Restored
December 18, 2025

This edition presents the only surviving text of "A Model of Church and Civil Power" (1635), preserved through Roger Williams' reproduction in *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* . The original manuscript has been lost to history.

Text collated from: Internet Archive digital collection , Hanserd Knollys Society edition , and Project Gutenberg edition .

Spelling and punctuation follow the 1644 printing. Scripture citations preserved as given in the original. Bracketed translations of Latin phrases added for clarity.

Historical Note

This document represents the only surviving text of "A Model of Church and Civil Power," composed collectively by John Cotton and the ministers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1635. The original manuscript has been lost to history. This text survives solely because Roger Williams reproduced it in full within his 1644 work *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* for the purpose of refuting its doctrines .

The Model articulates the theocratic principles that governed Massachusetts Bay Colony and provides the theological justification for civil enforcement of religious orthodoxy—the doctrine Williams called "the bloody tenent" of persecution for cause of conscience. This document directly contributed to Williams' banishment from Massachusetts in 1635.

The Model: Complete Text

PREFACE

Seeing God hath given a distinct power to church and commonweal, the one spiritual called **the power of the keys**, the other civil called **the power of the sword** (Matt. xvi. 19; Isa. xlix. 23; Gal. iii. 28), and hath made the members of both societies subject to both authorities, so that every soul in the church is subject to the higher powers in the commonweal, and every member of the commonweal, being a member of the church, is subject to the laws of Christ's kingdom, and in him to the censures of the church—**the question is, how the civil state and the church may dispense their several governments without infringement and impeachment of the power and honour of the one or of the other, and what bounds and limits the Lord hath set between both the administrations.**

The First Head: That Both Jurisdictions May Stand

Together

Whereas divers affecting transcending power to themselves over the church, have persuaded the princes of the world that the kingdom of Christ in his church cannot rise or stand without the falls of those commonweals wherein it is set up, **we do believe and profess the contrary to this suggestion**—the government of the one being of this world, the other not (John xvii. 36).

The church helping forward the prosperity of the commonweal by means only ecclesiastical and spiritual; the commonweal helping forward her own and the church's felicity by means political or temporal (Isa. xlix. 23; 1 Tim. ii. 2).

The falls of commonweals being known to arise from their scattering and diminishing the power of the church, and the flourishing of commonweals with the well ordering of the people, even in moral and civil virtues, being observed to arise from the vigilant administration of the holy discipline of the church.

As **Bodin**, a man not partial to church discipline, plainly testifieth: The vices in the free estate of Geneva, *quæ legibus nusquam vindicantur* [which are never punished by laws], by means of church discipline, *sine vi et tumultu coercentur* [are restrained without violence and tumult]—**the Christian liberty not freeing us from subjection to authority, but from enthralment and bondage unto sin.**

The Second Head: Concerning Superiority of Each Power

Because contention may arise in future times which of these powers under Christ is the greatest, as it hath been under anti-christ, we conceive:

Superiority in Their Respective Spheres

First, that the power of the civil magistrate is superior to the church policy in place, honours, dignity, earthly power, in the world; and the church superior to him, being a member of the church, ecclesiastically—that is, in a church way, ruling and ordering him by spiritual ordinances according to God's word, for his soul's health, as any other member.

So that all the power the magistrate hath over the church is temporal, not spiritual; and all the power the church hath over the magistrate is spiritual, not temporal (Luke xii. 14; John viii. 11).

Concerning Delinquency

Secondly, the delinquency of either party calleth for the exercise of the power of terror from the other part—**for no rulers ordained of God are a terror to good works, but to evil** (Rom. xiii. 3).

So that **if the church offend**, the offence of the church calleth upon the civil magistrate, either to seek the healing thereof as a nursing father, by his own grave advice and the advice of other churches; or else, if he cannot so prevail, **to put forth and exercise the superiority of his power in redressing what is amiss, according to the quality of the offence, by the course of civil justice.**

On the other side, **if the magistrate being a member of the church shall offend**, the offence calleth upon the church either to seek the healing thereof in a brotherly way, by conviction of his sin; or else, if they cannot prevail, then **to exercise the superiority of their power in removing of the offence, and recovering of the offender, by church censures.**

The Third Head: Concerning the End of Both These

Powers

First, the common and last end of both is God's glory, and man's eternal felicity.

Secondly, The proper ends:

First: Of Commonwealth

The procuring, preserving, increasing of external and temporal peace and felicity of the state, **in all godliness and honesty** (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2).

Second: Of the Church

A begetting, preserving, increasing of internal and spiritual peace and felicity of the church, **in all godliness and honesty** (Esay. ii. 3, 4, and ix. 7).

The Magistrate as *Custos* of Both Tables

So that magistrates have power given them from Christ in matters of religion, because they are bound to see that outward peace be preserved, not in all ungodliness and dishonesty, for such peace is Satanical—but in all godliness and honesty, for such peace God aims at.

And hence the magistrate is *custos* [keeper/guardian] of both the tables:

- Of **godliness**, in the first
- Of **honesty**, in the second
- **For peace's sake**

He must see that honesty be preserved within his jurisdiction, or else the subject will not be *bonus cives* [a good citizen].

He must see that **godliness as well as honesty** be preserved, else the subject will not be *bonus vir* [a good man], who is the best *bonus cives*.

He must see that godliness and honesty be preserved, or else himself will not be *bonus magistratus* [a good magistrate].

[Citations: Chamier. De Eccles. p. 376. Parker, part, polit. lib. i. cap. 1.]

The Fourth Head: The Proper Means of Both These Powers to Attain Their Ends

First: The Proper Means of Civil Power

The proper means whereby the civil power may and should attain its end, are only political, and principally these **five**:

1. Erecting and Establishing Government

The erecting and establishing what form of civil government may seem in wisdom most meet, according to general rules of the word, and state of the people.

2. Making and Publishing Civil Laws

The making, publishing, and establishing of wholesome civil laws, **not only such as concern civil justice, but also the free passage of true religion**—for outward civil peace ariseth and is maintained from them both, from the latter as well as from the former.

Civil peace cannot stand entire where religion is corrupted (2 Chron. xv. 3, 5, 6; Judges viii).

And yet such laws, though conversant about religion, may still be counted civil laws—as on the contrary, an oath doth still remain religious, though conversant about civil matters.

3. Election and Appointment of Civil Officers

Election and appointment of civil officers, to see execution of those laws.

4. Civil Punishments and Rewards

Civil punishments and rewards of transgressors and observers of these laws.

5. Taking Up Arms

Taking up arms against the enemies of civil peace.

Second: The Proper Means of Church Power

The means whereby the church may and should attain her ends, are only ecclesiastical, which are chiefly **five**:

1. Setting Up Church Government

Setting up that form of church government only of which Christ hath given them a pattern in his word.

2. Acknowledging No Lawgiver But Christ

Acknowledging and admitting of no lawgiver in the church but Christ, and the publishing of his laws.

3. Electing and Ordaining Church Officers

Electing and ordaining of such officers only as Christ hath appointed in his word.

4. Church Discipline

To receive into their fellowship them that are approved, and inflicting spiritual censures against them that offend.

5. Prayer and Patience

Prayer and patience in suffering any evil from them that be without, who disturb their peace.

The Limits of Each Power

So that magistrates, as magistrates, have no power of:

- Setting up the form of church government
- Electing church officers
- Punishing with church censures

BUT [they have power] **to see that the church doth her duty herein.**

And on the other side, **the churches, as churches, have no power**, though as members of the commonweal they may have power, of:

- Erecting or altering forms of civil government
- Electing of civil officers
- Inflicting civil punishments—no, not on persons excommunicated

Such as:

- By deposing magistrates from their civil authority
- Or withdrawing the hearts of the people against them, to their laws
- No more than to discharge wives, or children, or servants, from due obedience to their husbands, parents, or masters
- Or by taking up arms against their magistrates, though they persecute them for conscience

For though members of churches, who are public officers also of the civil state, may suppress by force the violence of usurpers, as Jehoiada did Athaliah, **yet this they do not as members of the church, but as officers of the civil state.**

The Magistrate's Duty in Matters of Religion

The magistrate, being **keeper of both tables**, must:

First: Establish True Religion

See that all their subjects observe and submit to the worship of God according to his word —for this is included in "godliness."

Second: Reform and Preserve True Religion

Establish, reform, and preserve true religion and the worship of God.

Third: Suppress False Religion

Suppress idolatry, false worship, heresy, and turbulent schism.

Fourth: Punish Religious Offenses

Punish with civil punishments (affecting body and goods) those who violate the first table through:

- Open blasphemy
- Idolatry
- Heresy (after admonition)
- Obstinate schism

The Ground of This Power

Since civil peace cannot stand where religion is corrupted, and since the magistrate is charged with maintaining peace "in all godliness and honesty," he must therefore use civil means (including the sword) to preserve true religion and suppress false religion—not to save souls directly (for he has no spiritual power) but to maintain civil peace, which requires godliness.

Church Power Over Magistrates

First: Magistrates Subject to Church Discipline

Magistrates, being members of the church, are subject to church discipline and censure for:

- All sins against the moral law of God
- Sins committed even in their judicial proceedings and execution of office
- Any scandalous breach of a manifest law of God

Second: The Church May Censure Magistrates

The church may:

- Admonish any magistrate who is a church member
- After obstinacy, excommunicate even the highest magistrate
- Judge the magistrate in all spiritual and soul-cases

Third: Grounds for Church Power Over Magistrates

The grounds for this power:

1. **Christ's censures extend to all offenders** (1 Cor. v. 4, 5)
2. **Every brother must be subject to Christ's censure** (Matt. xviii. 15, 16, 17)
3. **Magistrates are brethren** (Deut. xvii. 15)
4. **The church may censure all within the church** (1 Cor. v. 11)
5. **Magistrates are within, not above, the church**—for they are either without, or within, or above the church: not the first, nor the last, for so Christ is only above it
6. **The church has charge of all the souls of the members** (Heb. xiii. 17)
7. **Christ's censures are for the good of souls** (1 Cor. v. 6)
8. **In church privileges Christians are all one** (Gal. iii. 28, Col. iii. 11)

Fourth: Courts Are Not Sanctuaries for Sin

Magistrates may be censured for apparent and manifest sin against any moral law of God in their judicial proceedings, or in the execution of their office. **Courts are not sanctuaries for sin**—and if for no sin, then not for such especially.

First, because sins of magistrates in court are as hateful to God.

Second, and as much spoken against (Isa. x. 1, Micah iii. 1).

Thirdly, God hath nowhere granted such immunity to them.

Fourthly, what a brother may do privately in case of private offence, that the church may do publicly in case of public scandal. But a private brother may admonish and reprove privately—therefore the church may publicly.

Fifth: No Exemption from Discipline

Civil magistracy does not:

- Exempt any church member from watchfulness
- Deprive a church of her power

- Deprive a church member of his privilege to partake of every ordinance needful for their salvation

Concerning Election of Magistrates

First: Only Church Members Should Rule

All magistrates ought to be chosen out of church members (Exod. xviii. 21; Deut. xvii. 15; Prov. xxix. 2: "When the righteous rule, the people rejoice").

Second: Only Church Members Should Vote

All free men elected should be only church members because:

1. If none but church members should rule, then others should not choose, because they may elect others beside church members
2. From the pattern of Israel, where none had power to choose but only Israel, or such as were joined to the people of God
3. When there is dissent in court, they return to their first principles, which are the free men—who should be church members

Third: The Theocratic Commonwealth

In a commonwealth consisting of church members:

- Officers should be church members
- Laws should be consonant to the word of God
- The people's consent establishes both magistrates and laws

Concerning Liberties and Privileges

First: Only Church Members as Free Burgesses

That **all free burgesses be only church members**—so that:

- The commonwealth be composed of visible saints
- Civil power remains in hands of godly men
- Laws be made according to God's word

Second: Liberty for Church Assemblies

That churches may hold ordinary, stated, and constant yearly and monthly meetings, for which the civil magistrate should give liberty, for:

- Necessity of Christian fellowship
- God's glory
- Experience of benefit
- Good report

Third: No Persecution for Conscience

That magistrates permit these spiritual assemblies and not persecute the church for conscience.

Analysis and Historical Context

Summary of Key Doctrines

This Model establishes the following theocratic principles:

1. Dual Sovereignty with Mutual Subordination

Church and state are distinct but interdependent powers under Christ, each supreme in its own sphere yet subject to the other in different respects.

2. The Magistrate's Religious Authority

Though lacking "spiritual power," magistrates must:

- Keep both tables of the law (duties to God and man)
- Establish and reform true religion
- Suppress false religion, heresy, idolatry, and schism
- Punish religious offenses with civil penalties (including death)
- All justified as necessary for "civil peace in godliness"

3. The Church's Authority Over Magistrates

Churches retain power to:

- Admonish magistrates for all sins
- Excommunicate obstinate magistrates
- Judge magistrates in spiritual cases
- Exercise spiritual discipline even over civil rulers

4. The Reciprocal Paradox

- When the church offends, the magistrate judges and punishes the church civilly
- When the magistrate offends, the church judges and excommunicates the magistrate spiritually
- Both powers can be exercised "for the same cause" from different perspectives

5. The Theocratic Ideal

The Model envisions a commonwealth where:

- Only church members may vote or hold office
- Civil law enforces religious orthodoxy
- The magistrate acts as "nursing father" to the church
- Church and state preserve each other through reciprocal discipline
- False religion is suppressed by civil sword to maintain "peace in godliness"

6. Civil Peace Requires Godliness

The central doctrine: **"Civil peace cannot stand entire where religion is corrupted"**

(2 Chron. xv. 3, 5, 6; Judges viii).

Therefore, suppression of heresy, idolatry, and false worship is not merely a religious duty but a civil necessity for maintaining public order.

Historical Consequences

This document articulated the theological justification for:

1. **Roger Williams' banishment** from Massachusetts (1635) for his dissenting views on church-state relations
2. **The persecution of Quakers, Baptists, and other dissenters** in Massachusetts Bay Colony
3. **The execution of heretics** under Massachusetts law
4. **The requirement** that only church members could vote or hold office
5. **The suppression** of religious liberty throughout the New England colonies

Williams (founder of the first American Baptist Church; later "Seeker" of faith) characterized this doctrine as **"The Bloody Tenent"**—a teaching that had "let blood the nations" and was "deeply guilty of the blood of souls, compelled and forced to hypocrisy in a spiritual and soul-rape."

Against this Model, Williams argued for **complete separation of church and state**, **liberty of conscience for all**, and **spiritual weapons only** for spiritual warfare—principles that would eventually be debated as to whether they should shape American constitutional policy.

Despite modern hagiography, many historians have alleged that Roger Williams had no influence on the American Founders. His direct impact was minimal. The First Amendment's church-state provisions were shaped more by:

- John Leland (Baptist minister who influenced Madison)
- Enlightenment philosophy (Locke, Montesquieu)
- Pragmatic federalism (preventing federal favoritism among competing Protestant denominations)
- The Cotton Model's assumption that religion is essential to civil order

The Cotton Model grounds its entire system in typological fulfillment of Israel. Williams argued against this: "that holy mystical nation, the church of God, peculiar and called out to him out of every nation and country" is the true Israel—not any national state.

Textual Note

This transcription preserves the original 1635 document as reproduced by Roger Williams in *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* (London, 1644), Chapter LXXXI, pages 189–220+ .

The text has been collated from:

- **Primary Source**: Internet Archive, *bloudytenentofpe00will.pdf*
- **Hanserd Knollys Society Edition** (1848)
- **Project Gutenberg Edition** (2021)

Spelling and punctuation follow the 1644 printing. Scripture citations are preserved as given in the original. Bracketed translations of Latin phrases have been added for clarity.

Document prepared December 18, 2025
From the only surviving witness to this historically significant text

> *"Here is a model, framed by many able, learned, and godly hands of such a church and commonweal as wakens Moses from his unknown grave, and denies Jesus yet to have seen the earth."*
> — Roger Williams, introducing this document in *The Bloudy Tenent*, 1644